

VZCZCXRO1201
RR RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHLH RUEHNEH RUEHPW
DE RUEHCG #0289 2520736
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 090736Z SEP 09
FM AMCONSUL CHENNAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2467
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3850
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS CHENNAI 000289

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [PINR](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: ENGAGING WITH THE KARNATAKA GOVERNMENT ON RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM

REF: A) CHENNAI 213, B) CHENNAI 25, C) 08 CHENNAI 350

¶1. (SBU) The Consul General (CG) met with Karnataka's Chief Minister and Governor separately on August 31. Chief Minister Yediyurappa spent most of the meeting reiterating his state's plea for a U.S. Consulate in Bangalore. He also sought the CG's support for an "investor's summit" that will be held in Bangalore in December and noted that Yediyurappa plans to lead a trade delegation to the United States in October. In the wake of the July Muslim-Hindu riots in Mysore (ref A) and other anti-minority episodes in the state over the past 12 months (refs B, C), the CG took the opportunity to remind Yediyurappa of the importance of ensuring religious freedom for all faiths in Karnataka, noting that the Consulate would be participating in an Iftaar event in Bangalore later in September, as we had done last year, and that the USG seeks to promote freedom of religious expression. The CG also noted that incidents of violence in Karnataka late last year, followed by the terror attacks in Mumbai, had made a deep impression in the minds of potential foreign investors.

¶2. (SBU) Governor Hans Raj Bharadwaj, who took office in July, told the CG that upholding the rights of minorities enshrined in the Indian constitution was his "first responsibility." A former Union Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, senior advocate in the Indian Supreme Court, and a highly regarded legal expert, he also told the CG that he was sent to Karnataka with a specific mandate to pay close attention to the rights of minorities in Karnataka. He said that he threatened privately to dismiss Yediyurappa's government (the first BJP-led government in South India) if the state government failed to uphold India's constitutional protections for religious minorities. He also indicated that he had impressed on civil servants the importance of carrying out their duties properly (an apparent reference to instances of perceived police bias against Christian and Muslim victims of violence).

¶3. (SBU) Only days after his meeting with the CG, local media reported Bharadwaj as commenting critically in public on the Government of Karnataka's record on protecting minorities. S. Suresh Kumar, the state's Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, sharply criticized the Governor in a public letter, disputing Bharadwaj's assertions and noting that, "except for a few mischief-makers," there is no law-and-order problem in the state that merited the Governor's public comments.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: State governors in India tend to do little more than perform ceremonial functions and symbolic roles, generally preferring to stay out of the political limelight as much as possible. The previous governor of Karnataka gave the impression in person of being afraid even to discuss religious freedom. Bharadwaj, however, seems cut from entirely different cloth, and his remarks about his commitment to work actively to protect minority rights in Karnataka were forceful and unambiguous. He has multiple other interests, including a legal training center in his home state of Haryana, a family law firm in New Delhi, and deep involvement in Alternative Dispute Resolution programs. It was clear from the conversation that he was in the governor's job not for the ceremonial glory or easy living, but because he was sent for a

specific purpose by the central government. His character and background make him a credible counterweight to any temptation of the state government to give free rein to religious extremists.

SIMKIN